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Democracy, security and secrecy: How does democratic control of the intelligence community work in Spain?

Abstract

This article studies how Spanish democracy controls its intelligence community through three analytical dimensions: the political direction that the Government exercises over the set of organizations that make up the Public Administration, among which are the intelligence services; the parliamentary supervision developed by the Parliament and, finally, the jurisdictional control exercised by the bodies that make up the judicial power. The article studies aspects of configuration, design and performance of this type of control instruments and points out how they have a direct parallel with the development that the institutions that make up the Spanish political system have known..

Keywords

Intelligence community, Secret services, Accountability, Intelligence, Official secrets.

Cite this article:

Gutiérrez Villalta, J. and Casal Oubiña, D. (2024). Democracy, security and secrecy: How does democratic control of the intelligence community work in Spain?. *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*. 24, pp. 585-609.

1 Introduction

One of the most interesting aspects of the study of public organisations dedicated to protecting State integrity and security is linked to the secrecy and discretion that characterises a great deal of their actions. This interest is especially relevant when such actions are carried out within the framework of democratic systems where public authorities and their administrative agents are subject, in general, to the principle of openness of their actions and public scrutiny of their management.

According to Troy (2008: 433), the function of the intelligence service is defined by three elements. The first of these has to do with the fact that its scope of action is projected onto those threats that compromise the security of the state, its integrity, as well as its democratic nature. The second relates to the state's own need to collect, analyse and process information from all sources. Finally, it is imperative to stress that, in order to ensure the success of the functions and the efficiency of the information tasks, they must be carried out under the protection of confidentiality and secrecy.

It may be pointed out that secrecy is perfectly compatible with democracy, as long as it is exceptional (Bobbio, 1991: 20). This relationship operates on two levels: on one hand, that which has to do with classified information and the processing of official secrets, where the rules on classification, procedures and deadlines where secrecy operates must be clearly delimited. On the other hand, it is essential that State structures dedicated to this type of function have instruments to control the different powers in order to avoid arbitrariness and deviations of power.

In this regard, the main research question of this article is to understand how the activity of the Spanish intelligence community is controlled by democratic institutions. In order to answer the above question, this research is clearly structured into four distinct parts: first, a review of the literature and current scientific approaches to the relationship between intelligence services and the democratic system; this analysis, together with the study of the structure of the intelligence community in Spain, constitutes the theoretical framework of reference. Secondly, the research design is presented, based on the study of three dimensions of control (executive, parliamentary and jurisdictional) of the secret services. The third part of the article presents and discusses the main findings of the research and finally, its general conclusions.

2 Democracy and the intelligence services

The security and integrity of any State is affected by risks of a multidimensional nature, ranging from arms races to environmental issues, technological development, organised crime networks, disinformation and trade relations (Kriele, 1980: 268; Navarro, 2007: 117).

According to Alcantud (2005: 15) and Colonieu (1888: 32), intelligence was originally linked to the collection of information of a political nature related to the stability and evolution of other countries or to the military sphere through the study of defensive and offensive capabilities, as well as to the strategic operational doctrine of other states (Dupuy, 1990: 152). This vision has been surpassed today due to the emergence of dimensions that may generate risks for a State and its institutions, which has led to the need to reformulate this type of organisation that, born out of an imitation of police organisation models, has over time acquired a key role in political systems as advisory bodies with essential information for public decision-making processes (Díaz Fernández, 2005: 50).

The execution of these functions may be described according to two broad models: the first model consists of concentrated systems, where all these tasks are carried out by a single entity that centralises them. In comparison to this model, the second one may be defined as complex structures where intelligence functions are assumed, in a specialised way, by various entities that make up a network or community (Wheaton and Beerbower, 2006: 321).

Type	Subtypes
Concentrated	
Diffuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical: they are linked to a specific space (interior-exterior). • Specialisation: they act in relation to a particular field requiring specific knowledge (signals, environmental, industrial, technological, financial intelligence). • Sectoral: they focus on a specific environment (military, criminal, terrorism intelligence).

Table I. Organisational models of intelligence agencies. *Source:* author's own

The choice of a diffuse model will determine the existence of multiple organisations acting on the basis of differentiated criteria. When the criterion is geographical in nature, one may speak of bodies dedicated to internal intelligence (targeting internal threats within the State itself), external intelligence (targeting threats from other countries) and even geospatial intelligence. (Kovacic, 2012: 3; Ugate, 2012: 123). The second criterion that explains the existence of a diffuse model is related to the technical complexity of matters such as signal technology, environmental issues or financial intelligence. In this case, the existence of multiple entities that focus their action on each of these issues based on their specific knowledge can be observed. Finally, the third justification of the diffuse model is linked to the sectoral actions of each intelligence organisation, which may be military, counter-terrorist or organised crime intelligence (Díaz Matey, 2016: 217; Uribe and Mesa Palacio, 2020: 91; Ferrato, 2014: 62; Sansó-Rubert, 2006: 209).

According to Whitaker (1999: 17), the existence of intelligence structures, which are essential in a democratic state, entails the need for political instruments of control by the public authorities in order to prevent these types of organisations from carrying out arbitrary actions that are far removed from their primary function of protecting the security of the State and the democratic nature of its institutions. To this end,

instruments of political control are usually defined by the executive, as the power responsible for the State Administration (López Guerra, 1988: 17), for supervision by the legislature within the framework of its power of parliamentary control (Seseña Santos, 2007: 307) and for legality by the judges and courts in charge of applying the law (Alfonso Rodríguez, 2023: 58).

The political steering function is related to the executive branch and refers to an initial governmental control over the secret services. This is the initial mechanism for overseeing its functioning which is linked to the Government's position as the directing body for domestic and foreign policy, as well as for the different branches of the state's Public Administration (Porras, 1998: 338). In this regard, the intelligence structures constitute different branches under departments that make up the executive branch, which carry out their administrative tasks by setting objectives and schedules for the agencies under them.

As entities dependent on different branches of the executive branch, the intelligence services constitute a space on which the legislature projects its function on three levels. Firstly, by exercising the law-making function that provides such organisations with a regulatory framework within which to operate. Secondly, by providing the financial means to carry out its activities, through the budgetary function and, finally, through the parliamentary control exercised by the chambers that make up the legislature over the different bodies and institutions of the Public Administration. In this regard, it is necessary to highlight that of the three basic functions of the legislature, the fact is that the implementation of welfare states and public policies have, over time, generated a rationalisation of parliamentary work, the main consequence of which is a functional shift of regulatory and budgetary power towards the executive branch, leaving political control as its most relevant activity in the legislature (Cuocolo, 1983: 226; Di Ruffia, 1965: 404; Aragón, 1994: 23).

In turn, the judiciary focuses on ensuring that the actions of intelligence agencies are in line with the regulatory framework, and there are no deviations of power in the use of these exceptional mechanisms in democracy, and supervises the impact of these actions on fundamental rights and public freedoms in maintaining the integrity of the State and its institutions (Sansó-Rubert, 2019: 131). This control may be carried out by common bodies, when it is the ordinary judges and courts that supervise these functions, by means of specialised bodies, established exclusively for judicial supervision, or by means of hybrid ones, when both approaches are combined.

3 The creation of intelligence structures in Spain

3.1 Background

As Zorzo (2005: 76) points out, the initial direct precedent for Spain's current intelligence structure is the creation of their own intelligence services by both sides during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Following the 1936 *coup d'état*, in order to prevent

the spread of the uprising among the Armed Forces, the democratic Government of the Second Republic decreed the dissolution of the Army, although it maintained the Central General Staff of Defence, which proceeded to reorganise the Second Section from the very outset. This section was responsible for executing the functions of the military intelligence service (Rodríguez Velasco, 2016: 3) with the aim of providing the new regular army with an organisation dedicated to information supply.

Under the command of Colonel Estrada Manchón, and especially after the socialist politician Indalecio Prieto took office as Minister of Defence in Juan Negrín's first cabinet, the structure was redefined and an organic regulation was drafted that placed Republican military intelligence under the General Staff and the functional direction of the Presidency of the Government and the Ministry of Defence. Pérez Cipitria (2022: 72) notes that the new intelligence service was divided into six sections (Organisation, Information, Strategic Military Information, Strategic Technical Information, Military Intelligence, Photography and Cartography, and Special Section).

At the same time, in early 1937, the Minister of State, Álvarez del Vayo, promoted the reorganisation of the Diplomatic and Special Information Service (SIDE), linked to the Foreign State Administration, with the aim of controlling the activity of foreign intelligence services and neutralising the activity of agents of the rebel side. At the domestic level, efforts were also directed towards defining an internal intelligence structure, under the command of the Ministry of the Interior, with the creation of the Special Department of State Information (DEIDE) led by the Minister Julián Zugazagoitia (Preston, 2013: 551).

In August 1937, the Minister Indalecio Prieto carried out a restructuring of internal intelligence with the creation of the Military Information Service (SIM). The creation of the SIM, recommended by Soviet advisors in the image of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), entailed the absorption of DEIDE and the elimination of all internal intelligence entities run by the parties and trade unions that remained loyal to the Second Republic, as well as those created by the Autonomous Governments of the Basque Country and Catalonia (Navarro, 2007: 159).

On the pro-coup side, the need to set up information structures was slower. The Decree of 28 February 1938 completed the merger of existing organisations with the embryonic Information Service of the Northeast Frontier of Spain, the Information and Investigation Service linked to the sole legal party (Falange Española Tradicionalista y las JONS), and the Military Information Service into the Information and Military Police Service (SIPM) under the command of Colonel Ungría Jiménez and achieving successes in rearguard operations carried out mainly in Madrid, which remained under Republican control throughout the war (Thomas, 1976: 817).

3.1.1 Intelligence structures during Franco's dictatorship

The end of the Civil War led to the restructuring of the intelligence organisations, the defeat of the Republican side meant the dissolution of the SIM and the dismantling

of the Second Section of the General Staff, as well as the SEIDE. In turn and as part of a process of institutionalisation of the Dictatorship, the military coup plotters proceeded to replace the SIPM with a dual structure in which the Third Information Section of the Upper General Staff (SIAEM) assumed, with the Reserved Order of 5 February 1944, the function of confronting foreign intelligence services within Spain and “coordinating the action of the various bodies responsible for repressing them”, for which it created a sub-service called the National Counter-Subversive Organisation (OCN) specialising in infiltrating student movements. From 1940 onwards, the General Directorate of Security (DGS), under the command of the Ministry of the Interior, was responsible for functions related to police intelligence and focused on the repression of internal political movements that challenged the Franco dictatorship (Moreno Tejada, 2022: 80).

The structure would be maintained until 1972, when Luis Carrero Blanco, Undersecretary of the Presidency, promoted the creation of the Central Documentation Service (SECED) as an intelligence service directly reporting to the Head of the Government and which would absorb the capacities of the OCN (Villar Cirujano, 2015: 28), but above all with the aim of both subverting anti-Francoist movements and dealing with incipient terrorist threats.

3.1.2 *The intelligence services during the Transition and under the 1978 Constitution*

The end of the dictatorship and the process of political transition led to a new reorganisation of the intelligence structure in 1977, merging the SIAEM and the SECED and creating the Higher Centre of Defence Information (CESID) in 1977. The new intelligence structure of the young Spanish democracy was based on CESID as the governing body of the system, and the existence of information services in the State Security Forces and Corps (*Policía Nacional* and *Guardia Civil*) as well as in the three divisions of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force), which had their own military intelligence units. CESID was under the Ministry of Defence but had functional links with the Presidency of the Government (Ruiz Miguel, 2005: 126).

Between 1977-2001, there were several attempts at improving the efficiency of the Spanish intelligence system with the dual purpose of dealing with incipient threats such as radicalisation, economic or technological threats, but above all with the search for a structure comparable to that of Western European countries, given that the CESID had a pre-constitutional origin. In 2001, under the first absolute majority of the Popular Party (PP), the Government led by José María Aznar reached a consensus, mainly with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), to promote the transformation of the CESID into the current National Intelligence Centre (CNI).

As Villalonga (2005: 163) points out, the CNI is characterised by decisive progress in its civilian nature by making clear that it is functionally under the Presidency of

the Government (although it may be attached to the Ministries of Defence or the Presidency) as well as by defining its operational objectives through the Directives approved by the Council of Ministers. The second characteristic is its configuration as a special public body that enjoys functional autonomy in carrying out its functions and, finally, that its management is entrusted to a Secretary of State-Director who is the main National Intelligence Authority and at the same time assumes the management of the National Cryptology Centre (CCN, within the CNI).

Scope	Agencies
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Intelligence Centre Dependent body: National Cryptology Centre
Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centre for Intelligence against Terrorism and Organised Crime Dependent body: information divisions of the State Security Forces and Corps and Penitentiary Institutions Coordinating: information services of the Autonomous Police Corps and the Customs Surveillance Service
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Armed Forces Intelligence Centre Dependent bodies: information and intelligence structures of the Army, Navy, Air and Space Force

Table II. Structure of the intelligence community in Spain. *Source:* author's own

At the same time, Act 11/2002 (LOCNI) maintains the existence of other intelligence bodies, forming a community which, together with the CNI, has components of internal intelligence (through the Centre for Intelligence against Terrorism and Organised Crime —CITCO—, responsible for coordinating police intelligence entities and reporting to the Ministry of the Interior) and military intelligence (through the Armed Forces Intelligence Centre —CIFAS—, which integrates the intelligence sections of its three divisions).

The latest system restructuring has focused on its governance rather than the transformation of the Spanish intelligence community. They are implemented with the approval of Royal Decree 1119/2012 of the 20th of July, creating the Department of National Security (DSN) attached to the Presidency of the Government, as a support, advice and strategic monitoring unit for crisis situations, as well as the approval of Act 36/2015 on National Security, which configures a new Government Delegate Commission, called the National Security Council (CSN), responsible for immediate assistance to the President of the Government, as director of security policy and which enables coordination of the capacities of different ministerial departments and other responsible bodies.

4 Research design

Based on the study on the relationship between intelligence services and democracy, as well as the evolution of the organisation of the secret services in Spain, which constitute the theoretical basis and the analytical framework of this research, the

main question guiding this paper is to understand how the activity of the Spanish intelligence community is controlled by democratic institutions.

The main objective of this research is to conceptualise intelligence structures as an essential component for the functioning of Spanish democracy based on the balance between their capacities and the political control of their actions. Specific objectives include the modelling of democratic control mechanisms and the study of their performance.

Areas	Variables	Sub-variables
Political administration	Governmental control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year of creation • Type of organisation • Criterion • Organisational dependency • Functional dependency
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber • Extension of control capacity • Regulatory basis • Composition • Performance
Legislative oversight	Parliamentary control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations • Regulatory basis • Type of organisation • Composition
Jurisdictional oversight	Judicial control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations • Regulatory basis • Type of organisation • Composition

Table III. Dimensions of analysis. *Source: author's own*

To address the question and achieve the stated objectives, this research focuses on the study of three key analytical dimensions:

- a) Political administration of the intelligence services
- b) Instruments of parliamentary control and analysis of their performance
- c) Jurisdictional oversight mechanisms

The time period ranges from 2002, when the current intelligence community was created, and 2023, the end of the 14th Legislature of the democracy. It therefore covers legislatures VII, VIII, IX, X, XII and XIV. Legislatures XI and XIII have not been taken into account since they did not manage to form a government and, consequently, have a short duration and little activity.

4.1 *The political administration of the intelligence services*

As Table III demonstrates, the first variable to be analysed in this study is the control exercised by the executive branch. Although it is an element not usually taken into account in various studies on the secret services which analyse their structure and functioning, it is worth remembering, in the same way as indicated in the theoretical background of the research, that the structures dedicated to intelligence functions are part of the Public Administration and, therefore, within the Spanish political system

they are placed under the higher administration of the Government as the body responsible for domestic and foreign policy, as well as the General State Administration (López Guerra, 1988: 17).

Therefore, the first connection between intelligence and politics is created within the executive branch, to which they report on an organisational and functional basis. This connection is key to determining essential questions about the intelligence model of any country, such as the means of conceiving this policy by opting for a concentrated or diffuse model; how threats are perceived according to the degree of sectoralisation or specialisation of the agencies; or whether dimensions of functional decentralisation or hierarchy are observed in the case of a community network system or if, on the contrary, strongly subordinated agencies are opted for.

This research approaches the study of political administration on the basis of six parameters. Firstly, the year of creation of each organisation within the intelligence community in order to determine their age and the political moment in which they were established; secondly, the organisation type in order to study the greater or lesser degree of functional autonomy, taking as reference whether they are independent agencies, autonomous bodies, departments or mere divisions of military institutions; thirdly, it is essential to determine the criteria behind their creation, as they may be geographical (based on the physical space where they carry out their actions), sectoral (based on an understanding of the nature that defines their function—civil or military—) or specialised (based on the specific area in which they conduct their actions). Finally, their organisational hierarchy is studied, which allows the visualisation of the matrix of relations with the administration and certain parameters of formal hierarchy, as well as functional dependence which demonstrates how decisions are taken in the structure.

4.2 *The parliamentary control model*

The study of the Parliament's control mechanisms is crucial to understanding the powers of democratic oversight of intelligence structures. In this regard, it is necessary to remember that although it is true, as Fernández Sarasola (2000: 91) rightly points out, that initially the parliamentary function was linked to drafting legislation and preparing budgets, the current reality of parliamentary political systems, in the opinion of Vergottini (1973: 49), Paniagua Soto (2015: 4) and Montero and García Morillo (1984: 26) has seen a shift in their capabilities towards the tasks of control and promotion of governmental teams that are politically accountable to the legislature and which, in order to be established or remain in service, require its majority backing.

The mechanisms of parliamentary oversight are addressed on the basis of four sub-variables of study. Firstly, bearing in mind that Spain is an imperfect bicameral model, the supervisory powers of each body that makes up the *Cortes Generales* with

regard to the intelligence services are analysed, determining the type of specific control body. The second consists of understanding the type of capabilities of each chamber, which may involve complete control (when it covers all types of actions) or limited to certain issues. The third relevant aspect is linked to the regulatory basis of each oversight body, which makes it possible to appreciate a greater or lesser degree of interest on the part of the Government or the *Cortes Generales* in terms of oversight. Finally, the composition and performance linked to aspects of great relevance such as the Government's capacity to influence the parliamentary agenda is studied since, although in Spain the executive power participates in the organisation of legislative activity via the State Secretariat for Parliamentary Relations in the meetings of the decision-making bodies of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate, this capacity for influence may also be seen in the coincidence of the political colour of the head of the oversight body with that of the Government.

4.3 Judicial oversight

As explained in the theoretical framework of this research, the democratic control of intelligence services requires the supervision of their activity by the power that directs the administration (executive), the power that provides the regulatory framework, budgetary capacity and political impetus to the Government (legislative), and the power that ensures compliance with the law and the defence of fundamental rights and public liberties (judicial).

The tasks of judges and courts may be conducted via two models. On the one hand, it can be specialised when an *ad hoc* jurisdictional body is created, whose sole function lies in supervising intelligence structures, as in the case of the United States, where Article 50 of the US Code provides for the existence of a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), composed of 11 judges appointed directly by the Chief Justice, and whose decisions may be appealed before the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court of Review (FISCR), composed of 3 judges appointed in the same way. On the other hand, control may be vested in specific bodies that are part of the ordinary judicial system, as is the case in Australia, where these functions are performed by the Federal Court and reviewed by the High Court. These two models may be combined by the use of mixed criteria, such as the assignment to chambers or members of the ordinary judiciary of specific oversight functions over the work of the intelligence services, as is the case in the United Kingdom with review by specialised chambers of the Court of Appeal of England and Wales or the Inner House of the Court of Session in Scotland, both of which are subject to review under the *Investigatory Powers Bill* of 2016 by the British Supreme Court.

The study of the Spanish model addresses three elements to establish the type of judicial control system in place, which consist of determining: which courts have the capacity for control, what their regulatory basis is, what their composition is and, finally, what type of court they constitute (specific, ordinary or mixed) and its composition.

5 Results

5.1 *The function of political administration of the intelligence community in Spain*

As indicated in the methodological section, the first of the analytical variables is concerned with the study of the intelligence services, as an element that is part of the Public Administration, and which, consequently, is subject to the function of political control and direction that Article 97 of the Constitution grants to the Government.

The first of the issues to be highlighted is that Spain has an intelligence community made up of 9 organisations which, in most cases, predate Organic Act 11/2002, regulating the National Intelligence Centre, with the cases of the Guardia Civil's Information Service, set up in 1941, and the National Police's General Intelligence Commissariat of 1976, being of particular note. It should also be noted that three Autonomous Communities, the Basque Country, the Community of Navarre and Catalonia, have information divisions within their respective autonomous police forces that have integrated security functions in the territory.

It should also be noted that, although they are —strictly speaking— not part of the intelligence community, there are another five bodies: the General Commissariat of Judicial Police of the National Police, the Central Operational Unit of the Guardia Civil, the Customs Surveillance Service, the Executive Service of the Commission for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Monetary Offences (SEPBLAC) and the Prison Security Coordination unit, which perform a series of functions linked to obtaining police, tax, financial and penitentiary information and intelligence that place them as hybrid bodies essential to understanding the intelligence functions in Spain.

	Creation	Type	Criterion	Organisational dependency	Functional dependency
National Intelligence Centre	2002	Autonomous body	Integral	Ministry of Defence/Ministry of the Presidency	Presidency of the Government
Armed Forces Intelligence Centre	2004	General Staff Division	Sectoral: military intelligence	Ministry of Defence	Chief of Defence Staff
Centre for Intelligence against Terrorism and Organised Crime	2014	Sub-Directorate General of the Ministry of the Interior	Specialised in: terrorism and organised crime	Ministry of the Interior	State Secretariat for Security
General Intelligence Commissariat	1976	National Police Division	Specialised in: police intelligence	Ministry of the Interior	Deputy Operational Director, National Police

	Creation	Type	Criterion	Organisational dependency	Functional dependency
General Commissariat of Judicial Police	1978	National Police Division	Specialisation: police intelligence and organised crime	Ministry of the Interior	Judiciary and Public Prosecutor's Office
Guardia Civil Intelligence Service	1941	Guardia Civil Division	Specialisation: police intelligence, counter-terrorism and organised crime	Ministry of the Interior	Deputy Operational Director, Guardia Civil
Central Operational Unit	1987	Guardia Civil Division	Specialisation: police intelligence, counter-terrorism and organised crime	Ministry of the Interior	Judiciary and Public Prosecutor's Office
Prison Security Coordination	1994	Department of the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions	Specialisation: prison intelligence, counter-organised crime, counter-terrorism and violent radicalisation	Ministry of the Interior	General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions
Executive Service of the Commission for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Monetary Offences	1980	Administrative body	Specialisation: financial intelligence	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Enterprise	Commission for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Monetary Offences
Customs Surveillance Service	1982	Department of the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration	Specialisation: tax and customs intelligence	Ministry of Finance and the Civil Service	Deputy Director of Customs Surveillance, the Judiciary and the Public Prosecutor's Office
Intelligence Division	1983	Mossos d'Esquadra Corps Division	Specialisation: police intelligence	Regional Council of the Government of Catalonia	Major, Mossos d'Esquadra
Information and Analysis Unit	1982	Ertzaintza Division	Specialisation: police intelligence and counter-terrorism	Regional Council of the Interior of the Basque Government	Chief Intendant of the Ertzaintza Police Force
Intelligence Division	1987	Navarre Regional Police Division	Specialisation: police intelligence	Regional Council of the Interior and Civil Service of the Provincial Government of Navarre	Chief of the Navarre Regional Police Force

Table IV. Organisational and functional assignment of intelligence structures. *Source:* author's own

As may be seen in Table IV, there are four organisational models. Firstly, one may speak of a model of functional autonomy in the case of the National Intelligence Centre, which is an autonomous body, pursuant to its Organic Act of creation, which means that, according to Article 98 of Act 40/2015 on the Legal Regime of the Public Sector, it is an entity with legal personality, treasury, its own assets and autonomy in its management for the execution of functions inherent to the Public Administration. In turn, most of the agencies constitute divisions of the State Security Forces and Corps (*Policía Nacional* and *Guardia Civil*) and the regional police forces (*Ertzaintza*, *Policía Foral* and *Mossos d'Esquadra*), while CITCO, the Prison Security Coordination, CIFAS and the Customs Surveillance Service constitute departments of the Ministries of the Interior, Defence, Finance and Public Function, respectively.

The creation criteria are diverse. Once again, the CNI is unique in that its function is comprehensive and involves any geographical area (internal and external), as well as various sectors and specialisations, with sections on police intelligence, radicalisation, economic intelligence, counterterrorism and even communications intelligence, through the administration of the National Cryptology Centre. Military intelligence is the responsibility of CIFAS, while the State Security Forces and Corps have specialised police intelligence bodies that also carry out anti-terrorist intelligence and fight against organised crime (General Intelligence Commissariat of the National Police, Guardia Civil Intelligence Service, Central Operational Unit, Commissariat of Judicial Police, and intelligence divisions of the regional police forces). The Customs Surveillance Service specialises in tax and customs intelligence and drug trafficking and smuggling, SEPBLAC specialises in financial intelligence, while the Prison Security Coordination Unit is responsible for obtaining and analysing information on counter-terrorism, violent radicalisation and organised crime in the prison system.

Within this security scheme, most of the agencies are linked to the Ministry of the Interior or the competent Regional Councils in Catalonia, Navarre and the Basque Country. The Customs Surveillance Service is historically part of the Ministry of Finance and Public Function, the CIFAS is attached to Defence, while the CNI, according to its Organic Act, may be integrated into the Ministry of the Presidency or the Ministry of Defence. In this regard, it should be noted that in the Governments led by the Popular Party (2000-2004 and 2011-2017) it has been attached to the Ministry of the Presidency, while under Socialist Presidents (2004-2011 and 2018 on) it has been part of the organisational structure of the Ministry of Defence.

More complex is the functional dependency of the group of agencies that carry out intelligence functions in Spain. As mentioned above, the National Intelligence Centre, which may be a part of the organisational structure of two ministries (Presidency or Defence), is functionally dependent on the Presidency of the Government, whose regulatory framework assigns it the responsibility of providing the President with information, analyses or studies that enable action to be taken in the face of any type of threat or risk to the independence and territorial integrity of Spain (Article 4 of the LOCNI). The CIFAS reports functionally to the Chief of Defence Staff, who, in accordance with Article 12.1 of the Organic Act on National Defence, is the senior

advisor on military operations to the President of the Government, the Minister of Defence and is responsible for the operational direction of the Armed Forces.

The Secretary General of Penitentiary Institutions, who reports to the Minister of the Interior, directs the Prison Security Coordination. Whereas the Deputy Operational Directors of the National Police, the *Guardia Civil* and the Customs Surveillance, as well as the Major of the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, the Chief Intendant of the *Ertzaintza* and the *Foruzainburua* (Chief of the Navarre Regional Police) exercise operational management functions, respectively over the General Intelligence Commissariat, the *Guardia Civil* Intelligence Service, the Customs Surveillance Service, the Intelligence Division, the Information and Analysis Unit and the Intelligence Service. SEPBLAC is functionally dependent on the Commission for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Monetary Offences, which is the body responsible for directing and coordinating policies for the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing in Spain.

In this regard, it should be noted that Spain's intelligence structure has two bodies whose functional leadership does not fall under the executive branch. Article 547 of the Organic Act of the Judiciary determines that the Judicial Police is responsible for assisting the judiciary and the public prosecutor's office in the investigation of acts constituting a crime. In compliance with this mandate, the General Commissariat of Judicial Police of the National Police and the Central Operational Unit of the *Guardia Civil*, whose operational management, as units acting within the framework of judicial investigations, falls to the Judiciary and the State Attorney General's Office, as those responsible for the investigation of cases before courts and tribunals.

5.2 *Parliamentary control*

The second analytical dimension of this research explores the relationship between intelligence structures and the legislature. This function ties in with one of the pillars of modern liberal democracy: the principle of the executive's accountability to parliament. The notion of responsibility has two explanatory dimensions. On one hand, in parliamentary systems such as Spain (Article 1.3 of the Constitution), the legislature is the only body that has a direct relationship with the depositary of national sovereignty, and is thus the institution that expresses the plurality of Spanish society; on the other hand, it is necessary to remember that it occupies a position of political centrality, which means that the rest of the powers of the State need to have parliamentary legitimacy in order to be constituted and to operate fully.

In the case of intelligence structures, as part of the State Administration, whose political administration is entrusted to the Government, their activity is subject to oversight by the legislature. As indicated in the methodological section, the first area of study of this dimension has to do with the powers of control entrusted to each chamber of the *Cortes Generales*. In this regard, it is necessary to remember that in the Spanish political system the Parliament has an imperfect bicameral structure.

	Chamber	Control	Basis	Composition
Committee for the Control of Credits Earmarked for Reserved Funds	Lower House	Complete	Act 11/1995 and Resolution of the Presidency of Congress of the 11 th of May 2004	President of the Congress and Spokespersons of the Parliamentary Groups
Joint Committee on National Security	Parliament	Limited to operational oversight of the Government's actions in the area of National Security	Act 36/2015 on National Security	Ordinary
Defence Committee	Lower House	Limited to budgetary and operational aspects not declared secret	Standing Orders of the Congress	Ordinary
Committee of the Interior	Lower House	Limited to budgetary and operational aspects not declared secret	Standing Orders of the Congress	Ordinary
Committee of Economy, Trade and Digital Transformation	Lower House	Limited to budgetary and operational aspects of SEPBLAC not declared secret	Standing Orders of the Congress	Ordinary
Defence Committee	Senate	Limited to budgetary and operational aspects not declared secret	Standing Orders of the Senate	Ordinary
Committee of the Interior	Senate	Limited to budgetary and operational aspects not declared secret	Standing Orders of the Senate	Ordinary
Committee of Economy, Trade and Business	Senate	Limited to budgetary and operational aspects of SEPBLAC not declared secret	Standing Orders of the Senate	Ordinary

Table V. Main parliamentary oversight bodies. *Source: author's own*

In terms of parliamentary control of intelligence structures in Spain, there are a number of bodies with oversight capacity. There are three in the Lower House. The first is the Committee for the Control of Credits Earmarked for Reserved Funds, popularly known as the Official Secrets Committee, which has a dual nature as its existence is mandated by Act 11/1995 while its composition and functioning is a consequence of the Resolution of the Presidency of Congress of the 11th of May 1995. This is a body directed by the Presidency of the Lower House with a number of members equal to the number of constituted Parliamentary Groups, which need the support of three fifths of the Plenary of the Chamber in order to be elected, so that its composition must be agreed by a qualified majority. It has a dual function: on the one hand, it extends its jurisdiction to overseeing the activities of public services that are carried out with reserved funds; on the other hand, its members have the right to request a report on those matters subject to the Official Secrets Act, so that the exercise of this parliamentary supervision does not undermine the performance of activities under the principle of confidentiality. Its sessions are secret and neither its minutes nor the Journal of Sessions are published, and its members are obliged not to divulge any

information of which they have knowledge (Article 16 of the Standing Orders of the Congress), and they may incur criminal liability if they do so.

The *Cortes Generales* have seven other parliamentary oversight mechanisms, namely the Interior, Defence and Economy Committees, whose oversight of the Intelligence Community is limited to operational and budgetary aspects that have not been declared secret. The composition of these committees is the same as that of the ordinary committees of both chambers and is determined by resolution of their respective presidencies at the beginning of each legislature. Finally, there is an additional oversight mechanism, created in 2016 under Act 36/2015 on National Security, which is the Joint Committee on National Security, a body made up of representatives from both chambers.

It may therefore be noted that both chambers have similar oversight instruments (such as the Interior and Defence committees) and a shared space (the Joint Committee on National Security); however, it can also be observed that parliamentary control, much like the political system as a whole, displays an imbalance between the powers of both chambers, as the Lower House has greater oversight through a specific committee that extends its power of control to all activities of the intelligence structures, without there being a parallel structure in the Upper House.

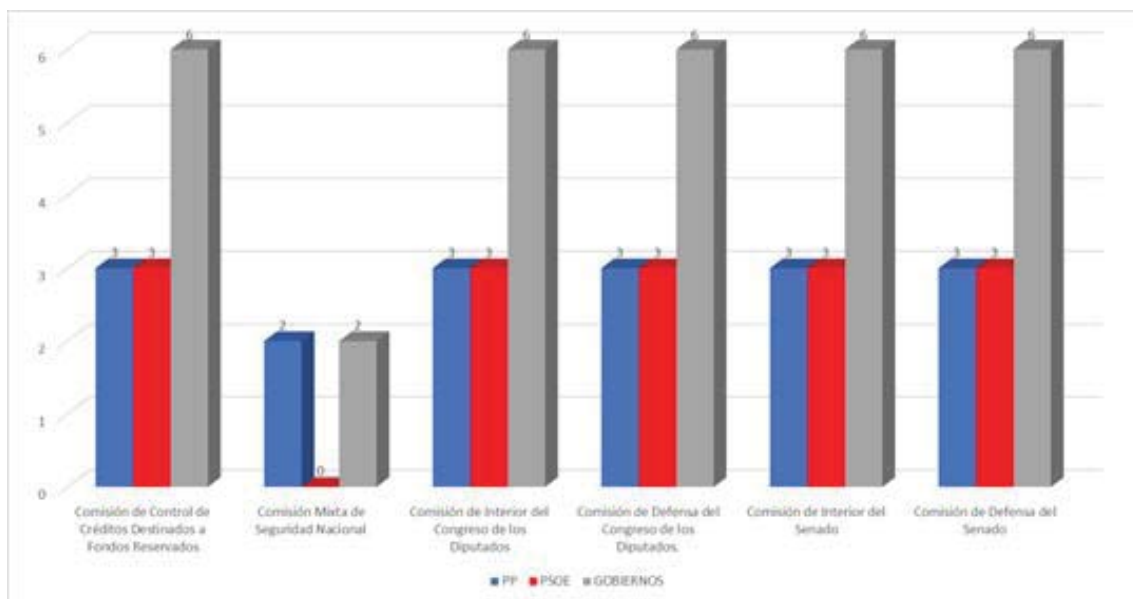


Figure 1. Control of the presidency of the main parliamentary oversight committees (2000-2023). *Source:* author's own based on www.congreso.es and www.senado.es

As may be seen in Figure 1, since 2000, six governments have been formed; the PSOE has governed three times (2004-2008, 2008-2011 and 2018-2023) while the PP has governed three times (2000-2004, 2011-2015, 2016-2018). This balance is seen in the control of the presidencies of the main specific committees overseeing the intelligence structures for each chamber, meaning that each party has controlled the presidencies

as many times as it has won the chamber's investiture¹. The exception to this pattern may be seen in the Joint Committee on National Security, which has always been chaired by the Popular Party since its creation, regardless of the political leanings of the Presidency of the Government.

This balance shows a tendency of the party leading the cabinet to hold the presidency of each of these committees and, therefore, to influence their work agenda, however, this balance has been broken in the Defence Committee of Congress, chaired by a Socialist MP in Mariano Rajoy's second term (2016-2018) and currently, under the PSOE-Unidas Podemos coalition Government (2019-2023) by a Partido Popular MP.

5.3 *Jurisdictional control of the intelligence community*

The last analytical variable is related to the judiciary's oversight of intelligence structures. Article 24 of the Spanish Constitution establishes that courts have the power to exercise effective judicial protection in order to protect the free exercise of fundamental rights and the subjecting of the public authorities, as well as the citizens as a whole, to the fundamental and other rules of the legal system.

The intelligence services are still an organisation of the General State Administration which act, under the political direction of the Government and with parliamentary supervision by the *Cortes Generales*, albeit in an exceptional manner, limited to the protection of national security, the integrity of the State and its democratic institutions, but also limited to a regulatory framework that defines the parameters of its activity. Therefore, much like any administrative structure of the state, there must be oversight based on the protection of fundamental rights and the guarantee of legality. To this end, two main models of judicial control have been defined in comparative political systems, as mentioned in the theoretical section. There are *ad hoc* bodies created for the oversight of intelligence structures, such as FISC and FISCR in the United States, but this function may also be entrusted to judges and courts that are part of the ordinary structure of the judiciary, as in Australia or the United Kingdom.

Scope	Characteristics
National Intelligence Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sole Magistrate and two alternative Magistrates Appointment by the President of the Supreme Court Authorisation of activities of the CNI that affect the secrecy of communications or the inviolability of the home
Other intelligence structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common procedure for obtaining information set forth in the Criminal Procedure Act for internal intelligence agencies Channelling through the Secretary of State-Director of the CNI for military intelligence agencies

Table VI. System of judicial control of the intelligence community. *Source:* author's own

¹ The Committee of Economy has not been included in this analysis as during several legislatures it has been integrated with the Finance Committee or subdivided with other areas depending on the composition of the Government.

As may be seen in Table VI, in the Spanish case, the current configuration of the intelligence community is that of a hybrid model of jurisdictional control. Firstly, it is necessary to highlight that Act 2/2002, of the 7th of May 2002, which regulated the prior judicial control of the National Intelligence Centre, opted for a mixed control model. Thus, its Sole Additional Provision modifies Article 125 of the Organic Act of the Judiciary and configures an *ad hoc* magistrate with supervisory powers over the activity of the CNI, whose appointment, similar to the US system, falls to the President of the General Council of the Judiciary (who is also the President of the Supreme Court), who must appoint a sole Magistrate belonging to the Second (criminal) or Third (contentious-administrative) Chamber of the Supreme Court. The function of this magistrate will be to authorise requests made by the Secretary of State-Director of the CNI for activities affecting the fundamental right to secrecy of communications or the inviolability of the home, which must contain details of measures, duration and persons to whom they are addressed.

The mechanism of jurisdictional control foreseen for the CNI is expansive in nature towards entities of the Armed Forces Intelligence Centre, which acts through the Secretary of State-Director of the CNI, as High Intelligence Authority, reporting on its activity to the executive branch, but also requesting authorisation for its activities. However, this mechanism does not apply to the vast majority of internal and police intelligence agencies, which are subject to the procedures contemplated in Title III of the Criminal Procedure Act (LECRim) on the functions of the judicial police. It is the ordinary jurisdiction bodies that are competent, due to the subject matter, to authorise and supervise the intelligence functions carried out by the State Security Forces and Corps, by the Autonomous Police, and coordinated by entities such as CITCO, which reports to the Secretary of State for Security.

6 Discussion of results

Four main preliminary considerations can be drawn from the research. First, it can be noted that the system shows a centripetal tendency, which is observed in the configuration of the intelligence community itself, which has an asymmetric structure.

Table IV shows the existence of thirteen agencies with intelligence functions in Spain. There are organisations attached to the Ministries of Defence (CIFAS), Interior (CITCO, General Intelligence Commissariat, Guardia Civil Intelligence Service and Prison Security Coordination), Finance (Customs Surveillance Service), Economy (SEPBLAC), linked to regional governments (intelligence units of the Basque, Catalan and Navarre police) and even functionally attached to the judiciary (General Commissariat of Judicial Police and Central Operational Unit of the Guardia Civil). The CNI, functionally linked to the Presidency of the Government, is an entity with a surprising configuration given that it is an agency with a concentrated vocation, as its scope of activity in intelligence matters covers all sectoral, geographical or specialisation criteria coexisting alongside

multiple specialised entities (police intelligence, anti-terrorism, the fight against organised crime, fiscal or prison intelligence) or sectoral entities (CIFAS in military intelligence) and even houses within its structure an organisation such as the CCN, which specialises in signals intelligence.

For reasons of functional linkage with the Presidency of the Government (responsible for the political direction of the General State Administration and domestic and foreign or defence policy), this hybrid and asymmetrical structure allows the CNI to act not only as the leading agency in the model but also to exert a kind of force or *vis attractiva* of its activity over the rest of the organisations, given that, together with its functional connections, its comprehensive vision of intelligence matters (which includes all kinds of specialisation, sectoralisation and territorialisation criteria) can lead it to become an entity that channels the main tasks of the Spanish intelligence system. This position is reinforced by judicial control, where, compared to other entities subject to the ordinary jurisdictional control, the CNI has a specific control mechanism which rests in a specific Supreme Court magistrate, structured in Table VI, which facilitates the agility of its functions.

The second consideration relates to a relevant aspect of the results, namely that the intelligence structures reflect the functioning of the Spanish political system on two levels. On one hand, with regard to the configuration of executive power, in Spain the Government responds to a “Chancellor model” in which the President enjoys a privileged position with respect to the Ministers. Enjoying the confidence of the Lower House, the President has the power of control over the Government, which can be seen in the ability to appoint and dismiss members at discretion, or in the power to settle conflicts of competence between departments.

This presidential nature may be witnessed in the evolution of the intelligence services, summarised in Table IV, in the configuration of the CNI, the replacement of the former CESID, whose design disassociates it from the Ministry of Defence, attaching it to the Presidency or Defence, but above all, functionally, to the Presidency of the Government, for which it is a strategic advisory body. This trend may also be seen in the definition of the governance bodies of the intelligence community, where the Department of National Security and the National Security Council are linked to the figure of the President of the Government.

The relationship between the political system and the intelligence community also applies to the instruments of parliamentary oversight. As defined in the results sections, Spain has an imperfect bicameral system where there is a clear predominance of the Lower House, which has a key and exclusive role in shaping the cabinet through the investiture of the President of the Government, as well as in maintaining confidence in the executive. This position is reflected in the instruments of parliamentary control, as, while it is true that there are identical interior and defence committees in the Lower House and the Senate—and even a joint committee on national security, as shown in Table V—, the truth is that their oversight capacity is limited to operational and budgetary aspects not

considered classified. Only Congress, through the Official Secrets Committee, has full oversight capabilities over intelligence activities.

	VII	VIII	IX	X	XII	XIV
Committee for the Control of Credits Earmarked for Reserved Funds	PP	PSOE	PSOE	PP	PP	PSOE
Joint Committee on National Security					PP	PP
Committee of the Interior of the Spanish Congress of Deputies	PP	PSOE	PSOE	PP	PP	PSOE
Defence Committee of the Congress of Deputies	PP	PSOE	PSOE	PP	PSOE	PP
Committee of the Interior of the Senate	PP	PSOE	PSOE	PP	PP	PSOE
Committee of Defence of the Senate	PP	PSOE	PSOE	PP	PP	PSOE
Presidency of the Government	PP	PSOE	PSOE	PP	PP/PSOE	PSOE
Government	PP, absolute majority	PSOE (ERC, PNV, IU coalition)	PSOE (PNV, IU coalition)	PP, absolute majority	2016-2018 PP (coalition with Ciudadanos) 2018-2019 PSOE (United Podemos, PNV and ERC coalition)	PSOE (coalition with Unidas Podemos)

Table VII. Political leanings of the Presidency of the Government and of the chairs of the main parliamentary committees with powers in the oversight of the intelligence community bodies (by party and legislature).
Source: author's own

Additionally, it is necessary to point out that in practice there has been a double dynamic in the functioning of these parliamentary oversight bodies, expressed in Figure 1, whereby the party that controls the Presidency of the Government also controls the presidency of the majority of parliamentary committees overseeing the intelligence services. These posts are not granted to parties with which there are government coalitions or legislative agreements and which, in the event that they are ceded to another party, go to the main opposition party, as in the case of the PP in the 12th Legislature when it ceded the presidency of the Congressional Defence Committee to the Socialists, or as the PSOE has been doing the other way around with the presidencies of the Joint Committee on National Security and the Senate Defence Committee, in the latter case during the 14th Legislature.

7 Conclusions

Three final conclusions can be drawn from the findings. Firstly, in relation to the research question of how the activity of the Spanish intelligence community is controlled by democratic institutions, the research shows that the intelligence structures are a faithful reflection of the Spanish political system.

This parallelism can be seen in two key points: on one hand in their political direction, where there is clearly a presidential aspect to the system, not only through the configuration of the National Intelligence Centre as a governing body of the model that functionally reports to the Presidency of the Government, but above all because, although the intelligence system maintains a community configuration of 13 organisations, its governance channelled through the DSN and the CSN also tends to reinforce the powers of the presidential centre over the set of structures that make up the intelligence community in Spain.

This aspect may also be seen in their parliamentary control, where the imperfect bicameralism that defines the Spanish political system is reflected in the supervision of the intelligence structures, given that, although there are similar bodies in both chambers, as shown in Tables V and VII, the Lower House also has a privileged position in this area, as it is the only body of the *Cortes Generales* that has a committee (known as the Official Secrets Committee) that supervises all activities of the secret services.

The second conclusion reached, derived from the first, is that the parallelism observed between the political system and intelligence structures offers a highly relevant research question as to the extent to which the functioning of this type of community is linked to the configuration of the political system via the study of three variables: political leadership, governance and parliamentary control. In this regard, a future line of research might be to focus not only on the formal aspects of control mechanisms, inherent to the democratic nature of political systems, but also explore their links with aspects of performance and the design of decision-making processes, which undoubtedly offer a broader vision of the role played by intelligence structures in contemporary democracies.

Finally, it may be noted that this research offers, in view of this future line of research, a methodology that combines theoretical reflection on intelligence services with key aspects of the configuration of the instruments of control, as well as their political performance, which may be exported to other case studies.

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Article received: October 10, 2024

Review accepted: January 21, 2025
